

# Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

## Minutes - 24 March 2022

### Attendance

#### Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel

Cllr Rita Potter (Chair)  
Cllr Clare Simm  
Cllr Paul Sweet  
Cllr Qaiser Azeem  
Cllr Chris Burden  
Cllr Stephanie Haynes  
Cllr Jaspreet Jaspal

#### Members of the Children, Young People and Families Scrutiny Panel that attended via Teams

Cllr Adam Collinge  
Cllr Val Evans  
Cllr Asha Mattu  
Cllr Gillian Wildman  
Cllr Mak Singh

#### Co-opted Members (5)

Wolverhampton Youth Council

#### Employees

Earl Piggott-Smith	Scrutiny Officer
Emma Bennett	Executive Director of Families
Sandra Ashton-Jones	Head of Mental Health
Jennifer Rogers	Principal Social Worker (Interim)
Rachel King	Head of Vulnerable Children

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## Part 1 – items open to the press and public

*Item No.*     *Title*

- 1 Welcome and Introductions**  
Cllr Rita Potter, Chair, welcomed everyone to the meeting and advised it was also being live streamed to the press and public.
- 2 Meeting procedures to be followed**  
Cllr Potter explained the process to be followed during the meeting for asking questions and reminded everyone that microphones should be muted and cameras off unless they have been invited to speak.

The Chair reminded the panel that the meeting was being held during a pre-election period which began on Thursday 3 March 2022 and that it was important that during this politically sensitive period care should be taken to avoid showing or giving the impression of showing any bias, favour, or support to any candidate for election or any political party.

3 **Apologies**

There were no apologies recorded for the meeting.

4 **Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest recorded.

5 **Minutes of the previous meeting (2 February 2022)**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 2 February 2022 be approved as a correct record.

6 **Local Area Special Education Needs and Disabilities Written Statement of Action (WSOA) - verbal update**

The Chair invited Emma Bennett, Executive Director of Families to give a verbal update on recent developments on the SEND Written Statement of Action (WSOA). The document was submitted to Ofsted in February 2022 for approval.

The Executive Director of Families advised the panel that the Council had received confirmation that Ofsted had approved the WSOA document without any amendments.

The Executive Director of Families acknowledged the work of Brenda Wile, Deputy Director of Education, and her team in co-ordinating the response and preparing the document for submission to Ofsted.

The WSOA document will now be presented to Council for approval next week.

The Executive Director of Families advised the panel about the future governance arrangements for reviewing progress.

The panel were invited to comment on the briefing.

The panel thanked the presenter for the update and welcomed the progress made since the Ofsted inspection of SEND report was published. The panel welcomed the positive steps and the work done across the Council to draft a plan which should deliver improved outcomes for SEND children and their families in the future.

Resolved:

The panel agreed to note the update.

7 **Supporting our vulnerable adolescents at risk of exploitation**

The Chair invited Rachel King, Head of Children's Service - Specialist Support and Sandra Ashton Jones, Head of Adult Service- Mental Health, to give their presentation on the work done across Wolverhampton to identify and support adolescents at risk of exploitation. The Head of Children's Service outlined the different forms of exploitation and the vision and expected outcomes from the Tackling Violence and Exploitation strategy.

The strategy document was developed by members of the partnership to respond to the different forms of exploitation. The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that a key aspect of the vision is strengthening the response and the early identification of vulnerable people to reduce or prevent any risk of them being exploited.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that the partnership response to all forms of exploitation was developed following a review in October 2019. The review considered how well the different services were working together to identify and strengthen pathways of support for young people and improve the co-ordination of services. The aim was to reduce the risk of young people being involved in activities that could lead to them to being exploited. The Head of Children's Service commented on the importance of the community supporting the work of the Hub which helps to also build resilience within the local community.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel on the key developments since the strategy document was published, for example, the introduction of a new exploitation screening tool and the development of a comprehensive online training package available to all professionals.

The Head of Children's Service commented on the development of work around supporting the transition of children into adulthood and the closer working relationships between professionals in children's and adult services.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that the original plan behind the establishment of the Hub was that it would support people aged up to 25 years but there has since been a recognition of the needs of older people which has led the development of an all-age exploitation strategy. The aim of the strategy is to facilitate a consistent and systematic sharing of information around the areas of risk so that professionals can build a better understanding of what is happening for people at risk of exploitation and to develop a clear plan for intervention. The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that a briefing meeting is held every morning which is chaired by the Exploitation Hub Manager. The purpose of the meeting is to review all reported overnight missing episodes.

The Head of Children's Service introduced Sandra Ashton-Jones, Head of Adult Service- Mental Health, to brief the panel about the work of the Power2 Team. The Power2 Team is a multi-disciplinary team and partnership programme which supports vulnerable young people aged 11 – 25 years considered to be at the risk of exploitation and or family breakdown.

The Head of Adult Service advised the panel that in April 2020 the service was expanded to support adults up to the age of 25. The service provides a trauma informed approach to help develop a good relationship between the young person and their case/key worker.

The Head of Adult Service commented on the benefits of introducing a multi-agency response such as improved outcomes for those young people and adults and the reduction in missing episodes.

The reduction in the level of risk around exploitation has led to improved levels of reengagement by young people in education and training.

The Head of Adult Service gave details about the impact and benefits of multiagency working in the Exploitation Hub and Power 2 and highlighted the level of commitment across the partnership to tackle exploitation in the City and deliver improved outcomes for young people and adults at risk.

The panel were invited to comment on the presentation.

The panel thanked the presenters for the report. The panel welcomed the introduction of tools to identify different types of exploitation. The panel queried the process by agencies to checking on the welfare of a young person returns home after a missing period and if there were any issues about the sharing of information when community or voluntary agencies was involved, such as a homeless charity. The panel were also concerned about situations where a young person did not want to speak to the police initially about their missing period.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that where a case involves a child up to the age of 18 the local authority has a statutory duty to offer every young person an independent return to home interview within 72 hours. A young person would be offered three separate meetings. The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that if the young person refused the offer to attend a meeting, then the service would be to continue to try and engage with them.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that where an absence involves an adult that while there is not a statutory duty to interview an adult, the service would offer high risk vulnerable adults the opportunity to talk about their reasons for going missing. There is further work planned to consider the current local offer to support adults who go missing.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that in respect of information sharing that the service works with colleagues in the Information Governance to check that the correct procedures are followed about the sharing the information within the Exploitation Hub. The importance of maintaining confidentiality is highlighted at the start of every briefing meeting to make sure that everyone is clear about how such information should be used. The service has not experienced any issues about the sharing of information between the different agencies represented in the Exploitation Hub.

The Head of Children's Service commented that the work of the Hub has helped to build a much stronger relationships and with the police. The Hub is well resourced in terms of police support as part of funding from the Organised Crime Initiative and has five intelligence officers and three police officers based in the Hub. The police resources have a dedicated role within the Hub to tackle the issue of exploitation and to work with colleagues across the different partner agencies to support the aims detailed in the Tackling Violence and Exploitation Strategy.

The panel queried how missing periods referred to in the report were calculated and an assessment of the progress made in reducing the number of cases.

The Head of Children's Service commented that the reduction in the number of missing periods has been supported using disruption plans. The overall number of missing episodes has increased because of changes to the way the police record

them. In the past the police used a 'absent' and 'missing' category to record the missing episodes but now all cases involving young people are recorded as missing and will be referred to the local authority which has a statutory duty to follow up and investigate. The change in procedure led to an increase in the overall number of missing episodes recorded.

The Head of Children's Service advised the panel that missing episodes are monitored. The Head of Adult Service added that the service can share information given in confidence if it would either prevent a crime from happening or where there are safeguarding concerns.

The Head of Adult Service commented that the authority approach to tackling exploitation is seen nationally as a model of good practice and has been contacted by other local authorities inviting them to share knowledge.

The panel congratulated the service on the positive feedback on the work of the Hub.

The panel queried the response to the service in response to the crisis in Ukraine and specifically the risk to children and young people who are refugees and separated from their families and travelling being exploited.

The Head of Adult Service commented that there was a Ukraine response mobilisation meeting yesterday to develop a multi-agency response. A task and finish group has been set up and will have representatives from adult and children safeguarding teams, education, health colleagues, police, and community safety partnership to plan a robust response to the situation.

The panel queried if early intervention work was being done to collate and share intelligence from community outreach groups, for example, ASB Teams and the neighbourhood safety teams about young people who may be at risk of exploitation, or who may be targeted outside schools.

The Head of Children's Service commented that the system was revised following the review of multi-agency working to help identify children and young people early, who may be at risk. The Head of Children's Service outlined the range of initiatives to identify and support children and young people in this situation.

The panel queried the potential financial savings because of the work of the Hub to intervene and support young people and adults to divert them away from other interventions which can be costly.

The Head of Adult Service commented on the work done as part of the evaluation of the project to show the cost avoidance particularly across all the service areas, for example, the young person not going to hospital and calling an ambulance. The estimated figure is £5 million in cost avoidance across the whole public sector (a way of decreasing your costs by lowering a potential increase in expenses) over a two-year period. The Head of Adult Service commented on the challenge in calculating local savings against national costs for the delivery of services.

The panel queried if the level of support offered to a young person at the start will decrease over time or would it stay the same. The Head of Children's Service commented that the level of support would continue for as long as needed and referred to examples of where young people have received support for more than 12 months, and longer in some cases.

The service will also look for opportunities to link the young person to other agencies that can also help meet their needs and increase their resilience.

The panel queried the work being done with neighbouring authorities to coordinate actions to tackle the problem of exploitation.

The Head of Children's Service reassured the panel that there are strong links across the West Midlands region. The work is supported by the Violence Reduction Unit which has a focus on reducing violence and exploitation across the region. In addition, there are subgroups that look at specific areas of exploitation and a regional criminal exploitation group which looks at how different authorities work together collectively to address issues such as 'county lines'.

The Head of Children's Service commented that work has started on drafting a protocol to cover situations when we need to move people out of their current address to a place of safety.

The Chair thanked the presenters for the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the progress detailed in the presentation to identify and support of people considered to be at risk of violence and exploitation.
2. The panel agreed to receive a further update in 2022 on progress at a future meeting on support for vulnerable adolescents at risk of exploitation.

## 8 **Children's Health Check survey - Social Work and wider workforce 2021**

The Chair invited Jenny Rogers, Principal Social Worker, to present the report. The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that annual health check report covers social workers in children's and adults. The focus of the presentation will be on the responses on the social workers in children's services.

The Principal Social Worker outlined the background to the decision to introduction of the social work health check survey. The aim of the survey is to identify areas of strength in social work practice and where extra support is needed. The survey findings are also used to assist with workforce development planning and continuous improvement.

The survey was extended from social workers to include the wider frontline adults in children's workforce as well. The survey response rate was slightly higher in adults social workforce compared to children workforce. The Principal Social Worker accepted there was room for improving the survey response rate and added that lower response may have been due to timing when teams were still facing ongoing challenges with responding to the impact of COVID.

The Principal Social Worker briefed the panel on the main findings from the survey, in terms of areas of strength and areas for development. The overall survey shows generally positive progress compared to the previous survey. The Principal Social Worker detailed the key actions which have been developed to address the areas highlighted in the survey and added that there were no surprises

in the areas listed. The Principal Social Worker commented that a key theme across both health check surveys responses was a desire for a better work life balance which has become blurred as people continue to work remotely and there is an acceptance that further work is needed to improve the situation.

The Principal Social Worker advised the panel that across children's social work and workforce, the issue of workload manageability has decreased slightly since last year but acknowledged the existing staffing challenges had been exacerbated as a result to Covid 19. The service will be aiming for better and earlier advertising of training courses, and more progression and variety of training. The Principal Social Worker commented that over 96 per cent of social workers said that were satisfied with the support they receive informally from their manager at times when needed most.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the key actions being developed to address the areas of concern highlighted in the survey responses and shared quotes about their experiences of working for the Council.

The panel thanked the presenter for the report and presentation.

The panel queried the role of the peripatetic social work team. The Principal Social confirmed the role would be like that of a supply teacher where they would be used where needed.

The panel queried if the use of the team would cause a delay in the recruitment of a permanent workers. The Principal Social Worker reassured the panel the introduction of the peripatetic team would not lead to any delays in recruitment. The aim would be to recruit quickly.

The Principal Social Worker added that the peripatetic team would consist of people who are permanently employed by the Council. There are only a few permanent vacancies, the bigger concern is recruiting for short term vacancies. The challenge is recruiting high quality agency workers needed and funding the cost of employing them.

The panel queried the reasons for the reduction in the number of social workers getting regular supervision. The Principal Social Worker reassured the panel that the figures do not mean that social workers are not getting support and advised that they would also be getting informal support, outside of formal scheduled supervision sessions when needed.

The panel discussed other professional development opportunities for social workers and highlighted the importance of offering alternative education opportunities to people who may not want to pursue a career in social work management.

The Principal Social Worker commented on the different career progression pathways available to social workers, for example, best interest assessors, approved mental health practitioner professional. The Council has also developed links with the University of Wolverhampton to offer social workers research opportunities,

The issue career progression options would also be discussed in supervision sessions.

The panel welcomed the report.

Resolved:

1. The panel agreed to note the report and the key findings.
2. The panel comments on the findings of the Children and Young People 's Service social work and wider workforce health check for 2021 to be considered.
3. The panel to receive a progress report at a future meeting in 2022 on the proposed actions to improve the health of social workers and the wider workforce and conditions of practice action plan.